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The Mapping of the Primary School English Vocabulary Learning Strategies: VOLSQUES Questionnaire

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Abstract

Based on the Ministry of National Education policy, English is not a compulsory subject in primary school level due to the Bahasa learning priority. For supporting this policy, Bahasa is taught longer in the classroom. Though there is limited support from the government, many primary schools are still involving English in their school curriculum as a local content subject or as an extracurricular. Bogem 2 Primary School in Yogyakarta is one of those which set English as a local content subject. In this school, English was taught between 2015 and 2017. Unfortunately, English is omitted now as there is no more English teacher in this school. However, Grade 5 students who experienced learning English on their grade 1-3 are still learning English from foreign tourists who are frequently visit their classroom. This unique situation becomes the main reason of conducting the present research which focuses on the vocabulary learning strategy mapping used by the Grade 5 students of Bogem 2 Primary School. The researcher applied a descriptive quantitative research method with VOLSQUES questionnaire using 3 scales. The results show that even though the respondents got frequent contacts with the English native speakers, they mostly gained their vocabulary inventory from cartoon movies on televisions.

Keywords: English vocabulary learning strategy, primary school students

Introduction

The Indonesian government policy through the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2013 set up English as non-compulsory subject in primary school level. From 2014 when this policy was started to be applied, this has become a phenomenal issue up to now. The reason behind the release of this policy is quite simple. The government wishes that primary school students learn Bahasa first before other languages as Bahasa is the communication language used in Indonesia and is the national identity ("Mendikbud: Bahasa Inggris Tidak Wajib, Bukan Dihapus," 2013). The government is worried that students might have no time for learning Bahasa due to their focus on the cognitive skills. For supporting the policy, the government add more time for Bahasa subject. Bahasa is used wider in all text books even in math and sciences subjects.

This phenomenon certainly invites various responses from the educational stakeholders. Some parents argue that their children should learn English earlier because English as an international language has spread widely and fast in their children's lives ("Orang Tua Siswa SD Tak Setuju Bahasa Inggris Dihapuskan," 2013). English has become more familiar on children as it frequently appears on various media such as television programs, food wraps, toys, games or even from the public figures who are close to children. The parents commonly prefer to send their children to the English courses outside the schools or to introduce English themselves at home.

Besides parents, some primary schools also disagree with the policy. They prefer to place English as a local content subject or as an extracurricular. This also happens in Bogem 2 Primary School which introduced English to its students in 2015-2017 as a local content subject. Started from 2018, the school should omit English from the classroom schedule as the English teacher resigned. However, there is a parent who comes regularly to the Grade 5 classroom with several foreign tourists for introducing English to the students. In other words, the students who have learnt English in their grade 1-3, they continue learning English from the non-native speakers of Bahasa.

The present research aims to map the English vocabulary strategies chosen by the grade 5 students due to their basic knowledge of English in grade 1-3 and their frequent interaction with the non-native speakers of Bahasa.

Learning English vocabulary is the first step before learning the English grammar (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). For gaining the sufficient vocabulary inventory, learners need to understand appropriate strategies which fit on them. There are five classifications of vocabulary learning strategies, namely defining word meaning, social strategy, memory strategy, cognitive strategy and metacognitive strategy (Oxford, 1990). The social strategy is the most popular among children who learn a foreign language. Using this strategy, the learners prefer to ask the experts such as friends, teachers, or native speakers.

Method

The present research belongs to a quantitative research using a survey for finding out the participants' specific information on their behavior, belief and ideas (Creswell, 2014). The researcher used a VOLSQUES questionnaire with 3 frequency scales namely; never, sometimes, always. VOLSQUES is a questionnaire designed for searching the vocabulary learning strategies for primary school level. Originally, there are 27 statements on VOLSQUES, however, the present study only apply 14 statements which are suitable to the 28 participants' backgrounds and contexts. The 28 participants were 9 girls and 19 boys with the age range between 10 and 14. All participants in the current study are on Grade 5 of an elementary school and have introduced a basic English level in their grade 1-3. Three of them have experienced English in their preschool level. The data gained from the questionnaire was then coded and classified regarding the participants' responses.

Results and Discussion

From the preliminary identification of the participants' views on English, the researcher found that 12 students were interested in English because of some reasons such as interesting, fun, nice to listen someone speak in English and having an idea for going abroad; 8 students did not like English as it was difficult; and 8 students did not give any responses. This means that more than 50% participants were interested in English whether in learning or only in listening to English speaking. From the VOLSQUES questionnaire, the researcher analysed the data using the percentage and mean. Here is the result:

Table 1 VOLSQUES Questionnaire Result

	Statements	Percentage (%)			
		1	2	3	0
5	I pick up words from films and TV programmes I watch.	14	79	7	0
13	I write down words when I watch films and TV programmes.	64	18	4	14
8	I plan for vocabulary learning in advance,	18	50	25	7
9	I remember a word if I see it written down.	21	46	25	7
10	I say a word out loud repeatedly in order to remember it.	36	57	4	4
11	I connect an image with a word's meaning in order to remember it.	18	54	25	4
12	I associate new words with the ones I already know.	7	7	0	86
14	I write down words repeatedly to remember them.	36	54	11	0
16	I make a mental image a word's written form in order to remember it.	32	46	7	14
18	I imagine a context in which a word could be used in order to remember it.	25	46	25	4
19	I translate the words into my mother tongue to understand them.	0	64	29	7
22	I listen to songs in the foreign language and try to understand the words.	50	39	7	7
23	I pick up words while reading books and magazines in the foreign language.	46	46	7	0
27	I pick up words from the Internet.	25	36	29	11

From the Table 1, it can be seen clearly that the dominant highest percentage of each statement is on scale 2 (*sometimes*) followed by scale 1 (*never*) and scale 3 (*always*). Among the 14 statements, there were 11 statements were responded highly between 36% and 79 % on scale 2. The Table 1 also shows that the mean of the data is scale 2 (*sometimes*) on statement number 5 with 79% students responded *sometimes I pick up words from films and TV programmes I watch*.

Regarding to the statement number 5, the researcher picked more data that most respondents in the present research loved to watch *Spongebob Squarepants* and *Upin dan Ipin* cartoon movies on Indonesia national television programs. The vocabulary gained were certainly limited on the character names on the films such as *Sponge*, *Mr. Crab*, and *Squid*. From the further information, most respondents admitted that they did not really know the meaning of these all words. They mostly only recognized these words as the names of the film characters. Only two students who really understood the meaning of those words as they sometimes watched the films in English version with the subtitles on paid television programs. Koolstra & Beentjes (1999) found that Grade 4 and 6 Dutch children who learnt English through movie subtitles showed greater English vocabulary inventory. This means that children are able pick up English words faster through listening how the English words are pronounced and reading the subtitles for understanding the meaning.

Besides, both respondents often related the characters' names, the forms of the characters and the descriptions of the characters. The character *Mr. Crab*, for example, they listened and pronounced the word *crab*, then closely watched the shape of *Mr. Crab* which has similar form to animal called *crab*. They, then came to the conclusion that *Mr. Crab* is a *crab* in the real life.

Conclusion

Though children do not get English subject formally in their schools, children have several ways in learning English unconsciously through some media. Watching films on television is the most popular among children. They recognize English vocabulary from the names of the film characters. Besides, children also gain their English vocabulary from games they play online as well as offline. They pick up English words from the game instructions, written texts and sounds from the games.

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